



# Community Justice Project

## Interim Findings & Recommendations

Over the last several years, Minneapolis has experienced a noticeable increase in the number of people arrested for low-level crimes. Sometimes called “quality-of-life” offenses, these crimes often include prostitution, disorderly conduct, loitering, graffiti, and low-level theft or drug crimes. Justice system officials and community leaders recognize the impact of low-level crime on communities, as well as the increased workload pressure these cases place on the courts. The growth in arrests for these offenses comes at a time when the crime rate for serious felony offenses has been decreasing.

In order to deal with low-level crime in a more innovative and resourceful way, Hennepin County began exploring the concept of creating a community court. Community courts have been implemented in several cities around the country as a collaborative effort between the courts and communities to address a broad range of low-level crime and other livability issues. In July 1998, Hennepin County District Court received a \$200,000 appropriation from the Minnesota State Legislature to begin the research and planning necessary to implement a *Community Justice Delivery Plan*. Community justice staff and

system stakeholders collected relevant literature, visited other community court sites, and met with the agencies and persons that would be most involved in structuring a community justice initiative for the city of Minneapolis.

As a result of this early planning process, it was decided that the community justice plan should be guided by the following principles:

**Collaboration** – system participants will collaborate with each other and the community in any community justice initiative.

**Problem Solving** - the criminal justice system will focus on problem solving as well as case processing.

**Immediacy** - offenders will fulfill a sentence within the shortest amount of time possible.

**Restoration** - in addition to individual victims, the offender will restore the community through constructive community service.

**Rehabilitation** - punishment will be combined with meaningful services so offenders will have the opportunity to change their lives.

**Information** - all justice system participants will have as much information as possible about the offender (and victim, if appropri-

ate) and the conditions of the community where the offense occurred. Communities will be kept informed of justice system activities, successes, and failures.

**Proximity** - community and social service functions shall be located in close proximity to the courtroom.

**Follow-up** - compliance with sentences will be closely monitored; offenders will be held more accountable for their behavior.

**Prevention** - the system will strive to prevent future crime by offering social services to those at risk.

In November, 1998, the community justice project employed the services of VisualResearch, Inc. to develop a conceptual framework and work plan to help decide whether starting a community court was a worthwhile endeavor, and if so, to proceed with the research required before a fully coordinated and operational community court could begin. The following summarizes the recommendations that are a result of that research (a full report is available from the Hennepin County Community Justice project).

### Hennepin County District Court Misdemeanor Filings, 1993-1998 (sorted by growth rate)

Offense Type	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	Growth Rate 1993-98	Growth Rate 1996-98
Sex Offenses **	90	133	76	184	515	717	697%	290%
Drug Abuse *	345	664	543	464	591	1,005	191	117
Disorderly Conduct	3,722	4,184	4,113	3,798	4,537	6,682	80	76
Prostitution	1,004	1,048	855	861	1,401	1,316	31	53
Weapons	219	302	311	238	245	228	4	-4
Vandalism	463	391	513	510	502	473	2	-7
Domestic Assault	3,641	3,693	3,628	3,450	3,369	3,099	-15	-10
Poss. Stolen Property	49	51	43	42	46	38	-22	-10
Simple Assault	1,136	1,110	1,066	1,016	900	845	-26	-17
Larceny	1,191	1,144	999	901	753	741	-38	-18
Forgery	364	270	202	175	169	135	-63	-23

\* Comprised mostly of “loitering with intent to sell narcotics” cases.

\*\* Comprised mostly of “loitering with intent to solicit prostitution” cases.

**FINDINGS**

- After having fallen from 1994 to 1996, misdemeanor court filings in Minneapolis increased through 1998. There were roughly 18,000 misdemeanor filings in 1998. Of the misdemeanor caseload processed by the Hennepin County District Court, 42% are disorderly conduct cases, up from 30% in 1993.

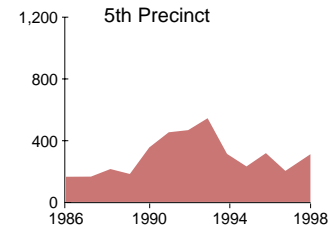
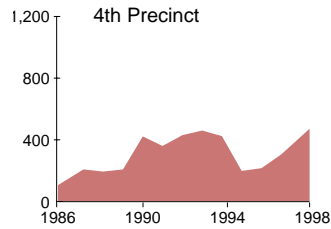
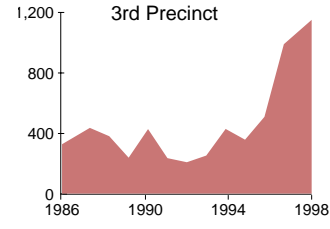
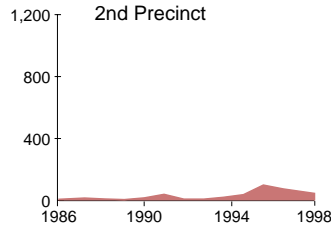
- The “sex offense” category, dominated by “loitering with intent to solicit prostitution” cases, has had the most dramatic increase since 1993 – rising 700%. This coincides with findings at the arrest stage and shows the increased workload pressure placed on the courts as a result of new police policies. Prostitution cases have also risen, although not nearly as dramatically (31% over the same time period).

- Like “sex offenses,” misdemeanor drug abuse violations increased greatly over the 6 years examined. Comprised mostly of “loitering with intent to sell narcotics,” the number of these cases rose 191%, topping out at 1,005 in 1998 (222 of these involved petty misdemeanor drug abuse cases characterized by “small amount of marijuana” and “drug paraphernalia”).

- Since 1993, decreases in misdemeanor caseloads were found in the categories of domestic assault, simple assault, larceny, forgery/fraud, and possession of stolen property. Vandalism and weapons caseloads remained fairly stable.

- The criminal side of the Hennepin County District Court pending caseload has been increasing steadily for misdemeanor offenses, while remaining stable for felony cases. As cases continue to accumulate, it becomes more difficult to make noticeable cuts in the pending caseload.

**Prostitution Related Arrests in Minneapolis, by Precinct**



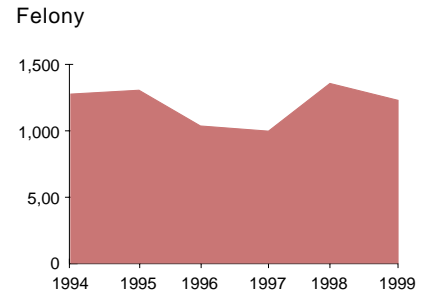
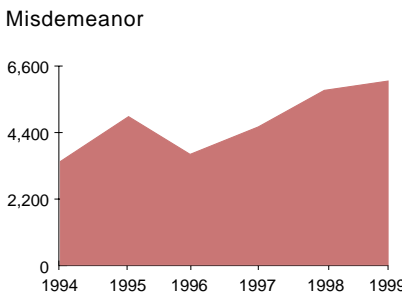
- The overall consensus of those responding to a citywide neighborhood survey was supportive of the community court concept for handling quality-of-life crimes in Hennepin County. Respondents considered the current handling of such offenses to be inadequate, and the majority were unaware of any community service taking place. Many describe the processing of low-level offenders as “revolving door justice.”

- In-depth interviews of high-level court and justice system officials revealed much agreement concerning the fundamental principles that should describe community court. All

understood or concluded that the goal of community court was to improve the processing of low-level offenders; however, answers varied regarding how low-level offenders should be defined and how a court should be planned and implemented.

- The dispositional analysis currently taking place should provide a baseline of case characteristics from the last six years, including type of disposition, sanction type, and case processing time for quality-of-life offenders. Project staff have already begun producing baseline statistics for use during the next phases of planning.

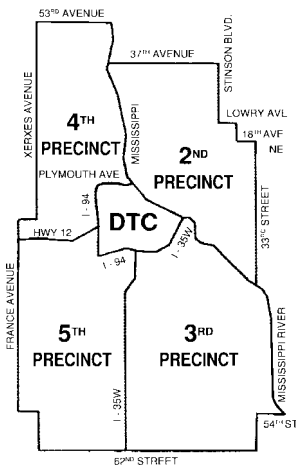
**Hennepin County District Court Pending Criminal Caseload, 1-1-94 to 1-1-99**  
(recorded as of January each year)



## ▼ RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Hennepin County data analysis, in-depth interviews, and policy discussions suggest targeting the 3<sup>rd</sup> police precinct as a catchment area for a community justice initiative. Defining a single “catchment” area geographically, by precinct or by some other boundaries, allows for more focused community justice strategies, and allows for statistical comparisons with other courts that are not community-based.

### Minneapolis Police Precincts



2 Since there is general agreement that quality-of-life offenses should be handled differently by the judicial system, but a wide variation of opinions on how this should be accomplished, officials should continue operating and experimenting with the one afternoon per week 3<sup>rd</sup> precinct community calendar. Once fully operational, officials can expect to operate the community calendar for roughly 5.5 hours per week. These estimates would require the court to expand to almost a full day of operation or to hear cases two half days a week. Early community calendar caseloads show lighter than expected filing numbers, due mainly to a lack of 3<sup>rd</sup> precinct case diversion.

3 Officials should make the most out of existing community based corrections, treatment, and social service agencies and groups. The Hennepin/Powderhorn Partners project, located in the 3<sup>rd</sup> precinct, is a good example of a current resource to be fully explored for case referrals.

4 The community calendar should be expanded in increments as officials reach consensus and obtain additional resources. Expansion can occur by broadening the eligible offense list or by widening the catchment area. Officials should choose the most straightforward cases first, excluding the complicated cases or those serious in nature, and choose offenses that do not place an immediate burden on the court. For example, cases likely to end at first appearance could comprise the initial caseload.

### 3rd Precinct Most Frequent Occurring Lower-Level Arrest Types, 1998

Arrest Type	Number of Arrests
Loitering with intent - Narcotics	1,009
Prostitution	593
Disorderly Conduct	563
Trespassing	543
Attempt to Cause Bodily Harm	402
Consuming In Public	349
Shoplifting	295
Weapons Ordinance	295
Drug Paraphernalia	281
Loitering with intent - Prostitution	281

5 Officials should continue to examine the various features of community court models in other cities, such as New York and Hartford. However, officials should not attempt to adopt another jurisdiction’s model in its entirety; specific system features from other cities should be adopted, discarded, or modified based on the unique environment and needs of Minneapolis.

6 While the political and economic realities in Hennepin County have required a Government Center location for the community calendar, officials should continue to explore the possibility of placing a community court within a given catchment area. Community courts that have been successful in other cities utilize facilities that are an alternative to a traditional large urban court complex. Community courts that are located directly within the catchment area are more clearly defined and can help provide a feeling of community ownership and improved accessibility.

7 Officials will need to develop a dedicated community court data system. Data collection and systems development should serve the *very unique* needs of community court, and should then be linked to the larger court data system. It is recommended that Hennepin County 1) obtain a copy of the community court computer system from Hartford, 2) visit Hartford and see how the system works in a courtroom setting, 3) be certain all required data elements are captured, and, 4) decide how to implement a system – through RFP, with existing contractor services (if available), or using in-house programmers.

### MISSION STATEMENT

*“To create in and with the community, a court that delivers immediate and visible community-based justice to quality-of-life offenders; such a court would approach offender sanctioning and treatment from a coordinated and comprehensive perspective to achieve victim/community restoration and offender rehabilitation in cooperation with existing community efforts.”*

Community Justice Working Mission, January, 1999.

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▼ **RECOMMENDATIONS** *continued*

8 A set of measurable performance criteria should be articulated using the current “working mission statement” as a starting point. At the onset, performance or outcome measures should be straightforward and easily interpretable, and should be relatively easy to obtain from existing information sources.

9 Data collection and performance reporting strategies should eventually be used to inform other justice system players of the status and result of court cases, especially for

police patrolling the catchment area. Data collection instruments should be developed as soon as is feasible to begin capturing required data elements.

10 Fully engaging the public is critical for developing a meaningful community justice plan. Officials should continue to develop better methods of communicating with the public through newsletters, town meetings, and the development of a community advisory board.

11 The Community Coordinating Committee should meet on a regular basis to receive updates and to provide feedback to the community calendar staff.

12 The community calendar should run for a specific time period and then be evaluated for continuation, expansion, or termination. The time period should begin after the calendar is fully functional and sufficient time has elapsed to set reliable and valid evaluation criteria.

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The report was developed under a community court appropriation from the 1998 Minnesota Legislature. Points of view are those of VisualResearch, Inc. and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Hennepin County District Court or the community justice staff.

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